

Just as someone gets ready to heave a companion through a painting of the House of Usher, a shotgun blast peppers the ceiling. The bartender levels twin barrels at the rowdies, threatening them with premature burial and one-way trips to the Rue Morgue. The fight terminates forthwith.

As normalcy returns, Rasdale and the cat venture from the corner. The fight's instigators pay damages and buy drinks for the house as an act of contrition. Rasdale orders bloody marys for himself and the cat.

LAUGHING STOCK

-- for captain threshold

Sweat rolls off Rasdale's bare shoulders as the sledge hammer finds the tent peg again and again. He is a roustabout with Cook Bros. Circus, one of the few still performing under canvas. Rasdale takes one last mighty swing and splits the crotch in his jeans.

Rasdale is hosing down the elephants when the fat lady waddles by with a message for him to see the boss. Rasdale is afraid someone's seen him feeding candy apples to the chimpanzees.

Boffo the clown is sick and old P.H., the boss, asks Rasdale to take Boffo's place for the evening's performance. Although expressing some reservations, Rasdale agrees to give it his best. It will be the first time he's played the fool professionally.

Decked out in grease paint, rubber nose, and baggy pants, Rasdale enters the ring with two other clowns, Rollo and Homer. Within the span of ten minutes, Rasdale is set on fire, drenched with water, hit with pies and gets stuffed in a giant salt shaker. He finds himself being laughed at by hundreds of people and loving every minute of it.

Long after the show is over, Rasdale, still in costume, sits at a mirror making faces. He has found his secret hiding place.

-- Robert Matte Jr.

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